



July 27, 2001

Ms. Cynthia B. Garcia
Assistant City Attorney
City of Fort Worth
1000 Throckmorton Street
Fort Worth, Texas 76102

OR2001-3264

Dear Ms. Garcia:

You ask whether certain information is subject to required public disclosure under chapter 552 of the Government Code. Your request was assigned ID# 149955.

The City of Fort Worth (the "city") received a request for information relating to two police officers and to "abuse of 911." You state that the city has released what it believes to be public information. You claim, however, that some of the information relating to the police officers is excepted from disclosure under section 552.101 of the Government Code. We have considered the exception you raise and have reviewed the information you submitted.

We first note that you do not address the request to "state . . . all arrests, citations, prosecutions [and] dispositions re 'abuse of 911.'" Although chapter 552 of the Government Code does not require a governmental body to answer factual questions, perform legal research, or create new information in responding to a request for information, the governmental body must make a good faith effort to relate a request to information that it holds or to which it has access. *See* Open Records Decision Nos. 563 at 8 (1990), 561 at 8-9 (1990), 555 at 1-2 (1990), 534 at 2-3 (1989). We assume that the city has made the required good faith effort to locate information that relates to "abuse of 911" and that you have released such information, if any, to the requestor. If not, then the city must do so immediately. *See* Gov't Code §§ 552.006, .301, .302; *see also* Open Records Decision No. 664 (2000).

Section 552.101 of the Government Code excepts from disclosure "information considered to be confidential by law, either constitutional, statutory, or by judicial decision." This exception protects information that is made confidential by another statute, such as section 143.089 of the Local Government Code.¹ Section 143.089 contemplates two different types of personnel files, including one that must be maintained as part of a police

¹We understand that the city is a civil service municipality under chapter 143 of the Local Government Code.

officer's civil service file and another that the police department may maintain for its own internal use. *See* Local Gov't Code § 143.089(a), (g). The civil service file must contain certain specified items, including commendations, periodic evaluations by the police officer's supervisor, and documents relating to any misconduct in any instance in which the department took disciplinary action against the officer. *See id.* § 143.089(a)(1)-(2). However, documents relating to alleged misconduct or disciplinary action taken must be removed from the police officer's civil service file if the police department determines that there is insufficient evidence to sustain the charge of misconduct or that the disciplinary action was taken without just cause. *See id.* § 143.089(b)-(c). Thus, subsections (a)-(c) of section 143.089 limit the contents of the civil service file.

Subsection (g) of section 143.089 authorizes but does not require the police department to maintain for its use a separate and independent internal personnel file relating to a police officer. Section 143.089(g) provides as follows:

A fire or police department may maintain a personnel file on a fire fighter or police officer employed by the department for the department's use, but the department may not release any information contained in the department file to any agency or person requesting information relating to a fire fighter or police officer. The department shall refer to the director or the director's designee a person or agency that requests information that is maintained in the fire fighter's or police officer's personnel file.

Id. § 143.089(g). In *City of San Antonio v. Texas Attorney General*, 851 S.W.2d 946 (Tex. App.--Austin 1993, writ denied), the court addressed a request for information contained in a police officer's personnel file maintained by the police department for its use and the applicability of section 143.089(g) to that file. The records included in the departmental personnel file related to complaints against the police officer for which no disciplinary action was taken. The court determined that section 143.089(g) made these records confidential. *See City of San Antonio*, 851 S.W.2d at 949 (concluding that "the legislature intended to deem confidential the information maintained by the . . . police department for its own use under subsection (g)"). The court stated that the provisions of section 143.089 governing the content of the civil service file reflect "a legislative policy against disclosure of unsubstantiated claims of misconduct made against police officers and fire fighters, except with an individual's written consent." *Id.*

Thus, if a police department takes disciplinary action against a police officer, section 143.089(a)(2) requires that records relating to the investigation and disciplinary action be placed in the personnel files maintained under section 143.089(a). The records encompassed by section 143.089(a) are subject to public disclosure under chapter 552 of the Government Code, unless an exception to disclosure is shown to apply. *See* Local Gov't Code § 143.089(f); *City of San Antonio*, 851 S.W.2d at 948-49; Open Records Decision No. 562 at 6 (1990). Section 143.089(g) provides that a department that receives a request for information relating to a police officer "may not release any information contained in the department file" maintained under section 143.089(g) and must "refer to the director

[of the civil service commission] a person or agency that requests information that is maintained in the . . . police officer's personnel file." *See also City of San Antonio v. San Antonio Express-News*, ___ S.W.3d ___, 2000 WL 1918877 (Tex. App. – San Antonio 2000, no pet. h.) (restricting confidentiality under section 143.089(g) to "information reasonably related to a police officer's or fire fighter's employment relationship"); Attorney General Opinion JC-0257 (2000) (addressing functions of section 143.089(a) and (g) files).

In this instance, the requestor seeks access to the police officers' "face cards." You inform this office that "[a] face sheet lists all the complaints investigated by the City of Fort Worth's Police Department's Internal Affairs Division and the disposition of the complaints." You also explain that "[t]he face card is maintained by the city's Police Department's Internal Affairs Division." You state that the city has released redacted copies of the two officers' face cards. You indicate that the redacted information involves charges of misconduct that were not sustained and written reprimands. You assert that the redacted information must be maintained by the police department under section 143.089(g) and that the department is prohibited from releasing this information.² Based on your representations, we conclude that the information in question is confidential under section 143.089(g) of the Local Government Code. Therefore, the department must withhold this information from the requestor under section 552.101 of the Government Code.

This letter ruling is limited to the particular records at issue in this request and limited to the facts as presented to us; therefore, this ruling must not be relied upon as a previous determination regarding any other records or any other circumstances.

This ruling triggers important deadlines regarding the rights and responsibilities of the governmental body and of the requestor. For example, governmental bodies are prohibited from asking the attorney general to reconsider this ruling. Gov't Code § 552.301(f). If the governmental body wants to challenge this ruling, the governmental body must appeal by filing suit in Travis County within 30 calendar days. *Id.* § 552.324(b). In order to get the full benefit of such an appeal, the governmental body must file suit within 10 calendar days. *Id.* § 552.353(b)(3), (c). If the governmental body does not appeal this ruling and the governmental body does not comply with it, then both the requestor and the attorney general have the right to file suit against the governmental body to enforce this ruling. *Id.* § 552.321(a).

If this ruling requires the governmental body to release all or part of the requested information, the governmental body is responsible for taking the next step. Based on the statute, the attorney general expects that, within 10 calendar days of this ruling, the governmental body will do one of the following three things: 1) release the public

² As the city correctly notes, this office determined in Attorney General Opinion JC-0257 (2000) that a written reprimand is not a disciplinary action for purposes of subchapter D of chapter 143 of the Local Government Code. *Id.* at 5. We further concluded that "[t]he department's confidential personnel file, maintained under section 143.089(g) of the Local Government Code, is the appropriate repository for a written reprimand." *Id.* at 9.

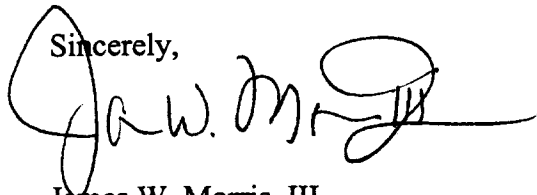
records; 2) notify the requestor of the exact day, time, and place that copies of the records will be provided or that the records can be inspected; or 3) notify the requestor of the governmental body's intent to challenge this letter ruling in court. If the governmental body fails to do one of these three things within 10 calendar days of this ruling, then the requestor should report that failure to the attorney general's Open Government Hotline, toll free, at 877/673-6839. The requestor may also file a complaint with the district or county attorney. *Id.* § 552.3215(e).

If this ruling requires or permits the governmental body to withhold all or some of the requested information, the requestor can appeal that decision by suing the governmental body. *Id.* § 552.321(a); *Texas Department of Public Safety v. Gilbreath*, 842 S.W.2d 408, 411 (Tex. App.--Austin 1992, no writ).

Please remember that under the Act the release of information triggers certain procedures for costs and charges to the requestor. If records are released in compliance with this ruling, be sure that all charges for the information are at or below the legal amounts. Questions or complaints about over-charging must be directed to Hadassah Schloss at the General Services Commission at 512/475-2497.

If the governmental body, the requestor, or any other person has questions or comments about this ruling, they may contact our office. Although there is no statutory deadline for contacting us, the attorney general prefers to receive any comments within 10 calendar days of the date of this ruling.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "J.W. Morris III", with a large, stylized initial "J" and a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

James W. Morris, III
Assistant Attorney General
Open Records Division

JWM/sdk

Ref: ID# 149955

Enc: Submitted documents

c: Mr. Riley Cantrell
2300 Sundrop Court
Fort Worth, Texas 76108
(w/o enclosures)